
The Bishop of *Peterborough's*
S E R M O N

Before the Right Honourable the
Lords Spiritual and Temporal,

The 17th Day of *February*, 1747.



Die Jovis 18^o Februarii, 1747

ORDERED by the Lords Spiritual and Temporal in Parliament assembled, That the Thanks of this House be, and are hereby given to the Lord Bishop of *Peterborough*, for the Sermon by him preached before this House Yesterday in the Abby Church of *Westminster*; and he is hereby desired to cause the same to be printed and published.



ASHLEY COWPER,
Cler. Parliamentor.

A
S E R M O N

Preached before the Right Honourable the
Lords Spiritual and Temporal,
IN THE
Abby Church at *Westminster*,

On *Wednesday* the 17th Day of *February*, 1747.

B E I N G

The Day appointed for a Solemn Fast, to
implore a Blessing from Almighty God on
His Majesty's Arms.

By J O H N, Lord Bishop of PETERBOROUGH.
Thomas

L O N D O N:

Printed for W. INNYS in *Pater-Noster-Row*.

MDCCXLVIII.

ST. E. R. M. O. N.

London Spiritual and Temporal

IN THE

Abby Church of Westminster

On Saturday the 17th Day of March 1797



By J. O. the Minister, did read a written

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JONAH I. Part of the 7th Verse. †

Come, and let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil is upon us.

IN the first and second Verses of this Chapter we read, that *Jonah* was sent by God to *Nineveh*, to denounce the Divine Judgments against that great and populous City, *because their wickedness was come up before the Lord.*

THE Prophet, instead of obeying the Divine Command, *rose up*, as he himself informs us at the third Verse, to *flee unto Tarshish*, in hopes of avoiding the disagreeable Office, which was enjoin'd him.

IN this manner, for Reasons which discover themselves to us at the Beginning of the fourth Chapter; but which are so far from excusing, that they greatly aggravate his Disobedience, did the Prophet act.

Nahum i. 3. BUT God, who, as the Prophet *Nahum* instructs us, *has his Way in the Storm*, chose this Manner of awakening *Jonah* to a Sense of his Duty: *For he sent out a great Wind into the Sea, and there was a mighty Tempest in the Sea, so that the Ship was like to be broken*: How vain was his Attempt of endeavouring to flee from the Presence of the Lord!

IN this Distress, the Mariners, we read, *cried every one unto his God*, and took the proper Precautions for their Safety; whilst *Jonah*, whose Guilt, one would have thought, should have kept him waking, was *gone down into the Sides of the Ship, and was fast asleep*.

UPON this we find the *Ship Master* expressing a very just Surprise, and Indignation at the Prophet's careless and insensible Behaviour; *What meanest thou, O Sleeper? Arise, call upon thy God, give us the Assistance of thy Prayers, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not: And they said every one to his Fellow, Come, and let us cast Lots, that we may know, for whose Cause this Evil is upon us*.

THEIR Manner of Reasoning upon this extraordinary Occurrence was very just and natural: It shews, that where there are any Sparks of Reason, there will be a Sense of Guilt, and a Fear of the
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the Consequences of it; and that the natural Turn of the human Mind is to acquit Providence from any Want of Care over us, and to seek for the Cause of what we suffer in our own Demerit. And though these Mariners were Heathens, as we find by their calling every one upon his God, yet the Reflection which they made upon the Calamity that had befallen them, would be highly proper, and becoming in a Christian. If they, in their Distress, thus called upon their false Gods, in whom was *no help*; how inexcusable must the Worshipers of the true God appear, if they, in *the Time of Trouble*, neglect to apply to Him, who is *mighty to save*.

It is an Opinion with some, that what we call the Judgments of God, should be rather accounted for in a natural Way; that there is neither Occasion, nor Room for any extraordinary Interpositions of Providence; and that such Interpositions would imply a Defect and Changeableness in the Divine Wisdom: These Men consider the Course of this World, as set a going once for all, and that all its Movements are as determined and necessary, as those of a Clock, or any other Machine. Agreeably to this Scheme, they must consider the supreme Being, as tied down to this Course of Nature, and consequently as unable to suspend, or alter it at his Pleasure.

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BUT with what View can such an Opinion be advanced? It is not surely proposed, under the weak Notion of saving the Supreme Being the Trouble of concerning himself with this lower World. The Perfections of the Divine Nature, which are the Pretence for making the Supposition, will not admit of it: The Words Easy and Difficult, when apply'd to the Power of God, have no Sense or Meaning at all; and if this World is left to itself in the Manner here contended for, it must, no doubt, proceed, rather from a Want of Inclination than Power to interpose in the Direction and Government of it: But for this Pretence there is as little Foundation, as for the other; since it would evidently imply a Want of that Superintendence and Care, which the very Notion of God carries along with it; and since it would as plainly destroy one of the strongest and most powerful Arguments for our Love of, and Trust in, Him. For if once we consider ourselves, as uninterested in the Divine Perfections, they will lose the Power of exciting and engaging our Attention.

OR is this Opinion calculated to exclude God out of that World, which He has made? This is not only weak, but ungrateful; and it is not easy to say, whether it is more remarkable for its Absurdity, or its Impiety. If God cannot suspend, or alter the Course of Nature, neither could he have
establiſh'd

establish'd it; and that it was not the Effect of Chance or Fatality, or any other such blind, and irrational Cause, has been often prov'd to the Satisfaction of every serious, and unprejudic'd Enquirer.

UNLESS therefore it can be made appear, that God has precluded Himself, by some Declaration of His own, from such an Interposition, the Conclusion that He does not, or will not interpose, is arbitrary and unwarrantable.

SOME of the Divine Judgments, and those of the most awakening Nature, consist in altering, or inverting the regular, and common Course of Things: Plague, Pestilence, and Famine are by no means Parts of the Original Plan, but have been the Offspring of those Sins, which they are sent to punish: There was a Time, when these Calamities were unknown; but Sin has thrown us into Confusion, and the natural, as well as moral World feels the Effects of it.

THE Divine Wisdom has, in many Instances, directed this Suspension or Alteration, and may, no doubt, in many more: And what Weight is there in the Suggestion that God is changeable, and inconstant; when He always acts up to the Dictates of his own comprehensive, unerring Knowledge, and varies his Measures, as the Exigencies, attending his moral Government of the World, require.

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A SERMON preached before the

To be thus changeable, is the Perfection of Wisdom, and must convince us of the Happiness and Security of being under his Inspection and Care, who can visit us with his Mercies, or his Judgments, as our real Wants, and his real Compassion, shall direct. These Suspensions, or Alterations do not imply any Defect in the Workmanship, or Inconstancy in the great Artificer: They rather tend to display the Perfection of this present System, when we see, and feel the Inconveniencies and Dangers, which arise from these Interruptions or Changes; and they likewise magnify that wise Indulgence, which thus adapts its Applications to our Necessities, and makes the *natural* World, in such a Variety of Instances, subservient to the Interests of the *moral*.

BUT if Men resolve these extraordinary Occurrences, and Interpositions of Providence into the ordinary, and settled Course of Things, the Instruction, and Warning which they are intended to convey, will certainly lose all their Force.

FOR what is it, that chiefly affects the Mind upon these Occasions, and gives it a serious, and religious Turn? An Apprehension, no doubt, of the Divine Displeasure, exerting itself after this *extraordinary* Manner for our *Admonition*, and Punishment: But if what thus happens, is considered

sider'd only as a natural Event, and agreeable to the *settled* Course of Things, it will not be received as any particular Mark, or Instance of the Divine Displeasure. And what then will be the Consequence of this Opinion, and of what Use or Benefit can it be to Mankind? Under the Pretence of rescuing them from superstitious, and ill grounded Fears, it destroys all the salutary Effects of these Judgments, and leaves them nothing, but the Judgments themselves.

THERE is one Way, and but one, of turning these Judgments eventually into Blessings, and that is, when they lead us to Repentance and Reformation: Wise and good Men find the Comfort, and Advantage of seeing, and considering them in this Light: Whereas when we suffer them, without their being able to work in us these Effects, they are Judgments *indeed*.

LET us try the Opinion, which I have been confuting, with a View to that particular Event, which gave Occasion to the Words of my Text: If this Storm had arisen in the natural, and ordinary Course of Things, it is reasonable to conclude, that the throwing *Jonah* into the Sea would not have allay'd it: Nay, farther, if the Prophet had not known, that this was a Providential Interposition, calculated to answer a particular Purpose, namely, his own Punishment; it

A SERMON *preached before the*

is not to be conceiv'd, that he would have directed the Mariners to this Method of appeasing it: But we read that as soon as *Jonah* was cast forth into the Sea, the Sea ceased from her raging: As soon as the Mariners got rid of their guilty Passenger, the Danger was over. This *Jonah* had told them would be the Case, as we read at the Twelfth Verse; *He said unto them, Take me up, and cast me forth into the Sea; so shall the Sea be calm unto you; for I know that for my Sake, this great Tempest is upon you.* And we find in the Sequel of this Relation, that every Thing answered, and that the Mariners were so sensible of the Interposition, and Power of the God of *Jonah*, that they fear'd the Lord exceedingly, and offered a Sacrifice unto the Lord, and made Vows. Admitting then the Truth of this Relation, it contains a direct Proof of the Point which I am supporting; that the Course of Nature is not so fixed and certain, as to exclude any extraordinary Interpositions, or Interruptions, when the Wisdom of God, and the Ends of his moral Government shall call for them.

AND when we consider in what a disadvantageous Light the Prophet appears throughout this Prophecy, in his Disobedience to the Divine Command, in his impatient and peevish Behaviour; and in the Repinings, and even Anger, which he expressed against the Divine Goodness and Com-
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passion in sparing *Nineveh*; there cannot be even the Shadow of a Pretence for doubting the Reality of what is here recorded. It is an Argument of the strictest Regard to Truth, that the Prophet is thus severe upon his own Character; and therefore if we consider him only in the same View, in which we consider any other Writer of Facts, we shall discover such abundant Evidence of his Sincerity, as leaves no room for any just Suspicion, any reasonable Exception.

GREAT Advantage has been taken of this Openness and Ingenuity, and the Prophet has met with the most ungenerous Treatment; but surely with as little Reason, as Decency, as will easily appear to the candid and unprejudiced Enquirer*.

THERE can then be no well-grounded Doubt, but that the same Being who appointed the present Order and Course of Things, can suspend or alter it,

* CHARACTER. Lib. III. Page 119. 1723. The noble Author has attempted to expose this whole History, by throwing it into so ludicrous a Light, that every serious Reader must be offended: But had he wrote with some shew of Decency, it appears to me to be quite destitute of that *Benevolence* and *generous Affection*, which this Writer recommends, to upbraid the Prophet with those Frailties and Infirmities, which he has recorded of himself for the Benefit of others, and in order to do the greater Justice to the Divine Goodness and Compassion. The Liberties here taken with the Character of God Almighty, as well as that of his Prophet, must convince us that this celebrated Author had his favourite Ridicule under no sort of Command.

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it, for wise Reasons; either in order to give Support and Authority to the Messengers of his Will, or for the Correction and Punishment of wicked Men: *He turneth rivers into a wilderness, and the watersprings into a dry ground; a fruitful land into barrenness, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein.*

AND when God interposes in this extraordinary Manner, in order to make some *effectual* and *lasting* Impressions upon Mankind; it is a wrong, and perverse Application of these Judgments, to treat them only, as so many common Events; not as the Effects of our own Sins, or the Divine Displeasure, but as what *must* have happened, independently of any of these Considerations.

THE Judgments of God are designed to bring about our Reformation, not to gratify our Curiosity; and therefore we make an improper, as well as dangerous Use of them, when we employ that Time, in resolving them into natural Causes, which should be employed in drawing out all that Instruction and Improvement, which are graciously intended. These *arrows of the Almighty* never fly, much less wound, without a wise Direction; *affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble, of this nature especially, spring out of the ground; and though man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upwards, it is his Wickedness and his*
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Guilt which have called for this Severity, and made it necessary.

UPON the whole then; Instead of resolving the Judgments of God into the Course of Nature, and treating them as Events merely natural; the wisest, and safest Conclusion upon these Occasions is undoubtedly this, That the God of Nature is angry: He sees his righteous Laws neglected and transgressed, and He chastises us for our Disobedience and Ingratitude.

AND now to bring this Matter home to ourselves, with respect to the Evils which lately threatened, as well as those that still hang over us. Let us consider with ourselves, for *whose cause* they were, and are *upon us*; and how instrumental we ourselves have been in bringing them upon this Nation.

LET us consider seriously with ourselves, whether our Neglect and Contempt of the Religion, which we profess, did not contribute greatly to bring it into its late Danger; whether it did not give Encouragement to our Enemies to attempt its Subversion; and whether it did not so far displease the Almighty, as for a Time to give us Reason to fear that we were deprived of his Protection.

LET

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LET us consider with ourselves, whether that habitual Disregard to publick Worship, which has for many Years been growing upon us, may not sooner or later introduce the Loss of those happy Opportunities, which we have too wantonly thrown away; whether the Disinclination and even Backwardness that we betray in attending that decent, and *reasonable service*, which is performed in our religious Assemblies, may not by degrees make way for the Pageantry and Absurdities of Popery.

IT is a singular Unhappiness attending the present State of human Nature, that we seldom know how to set a just Value upon the Blessings which we enjoy, 'till we are in Danger of losing them: We then began to fear that Change, with which our own Provocations, and the Divine Displeasure so plainly threatened us. We then clearly saw the wide Difference between the mild and merciful Genius of Christianity, as it is professed among us, and the persecuting, exterminating Spirit of that Religion, which longs to be uppermost, in order to *lord it over* the Consciences of Men, and to oblige them either to be Hypocrites or Martyrs.

IT is strange that the *continued* Favour and Loving-Kindness of God should have so little Effect upon reasonable Beings, and that they should seldom or never seek Him, 'till He *hides his face from*

from them: In order to make us duly sensible of the Blessing of professing so *pure* a Religion, the uninterrupted Enjoyment of it is by no Means sufficient; this is so far from securing our Gratitude, that it plainly endangers it: We grow careless, and sleepy in this Calm, and it requires all the Noise and Danger of a Storm to awake us: Thus we may observe that even those Protestants who seemed all along to have been unaffected with the reasonable and admirable Manner, in which we worship the supreme Being, by being alarm'd with the Errors and Corruptions of Popery, were recover'd to a just Sense of Things, and expressed the strongest Desires to preserve the Continuance of a Blessing, which before they had overlooked.

LET us consider likewise seriously with ourselves, whether the great Risk which our Civil Liberty at that Time ran, did not, in a good measure, arise from our own Abuse of it. The People of this Nation have for several Years been wild in their Notions upon Liberty, and it has been understood to give them an Exemption from Restraints of every kind: They seem to have enlarged their Ideas of *English* Liberty beyond what can ever belong to reasonable Beings, or be reconciled with any true Principles even of a Free Government.

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WHEREAS true Liberty is Confinement; Confinement to Truth, to Decency, to Virtue, to Religion; all the rest, call it what you please, is being Slaves to our Passions; and, in this just View, those very Acts, which some Men exert in proof of their Liberty, destroy it. Our being Members of this Civil Community, does not cancel, or release us from, those moral Obligations which belong to us, as reasonable Beings. Our being *Englishmen* can give us no Title to be abusive and scurrilous, profane, and blasphemous: Our living under the Laws of any Community, be the Constitution of it ever so free, can never be supposed to set us above those Laws: Be the Community ever so free, its Laws are absolute, and, by being so, are the greatest Security of our Liberties.

IT would probably be some Mortification to Libertines, to be told that they are the best Friends to arbitrary Power; and yet there is Reason and good Sense to support the Charge: The Transition from one Extreme to another is more natural than is easily imagined: Profaneness is doing the Work of Superstition; and Superstition will again bring us back to Profaneness: A wanton Abuse of Civil Liberty weakens a free Government, and consequently makes it an easier Prey to a despotic one.

HAPPY

HAPPY is the Man, who has so just and true a Notion of Religious and Civil Liberty, as to avoid Excesses ; who pays God a regular, and reasonable Service, and who conducts himself as an useful, and peaceable Member of Society : The Happiness, and indeed Safety of a Community depend greatly upon such a Behaviour ; for these are always disturb'd and endanger'd by the Unruly and Pragmatical, who are ever in Motion, and are perpetually making Excursions from their Duty.

LET us consider farther, as this Solemnity directs, whether that Almighty Being, who *maketh Wars to cease*, does not permit that just, and necessary War, in which we are now engag'd, still to rage, in order to *humble and to prove us*, and to convince us that in Him is our Strength ; and whether these Considerations should not effectually recommend that Care and Watchfulness in all the different Relations we bear, which will certainly procure the Divine Favour, and render us a People, whom the Lord will *delight to bless*.

ONCE more ; Let us reflect seriously with ourselves, whether that Excess, and Luxury, which has for many Years unhappily prevail'd among us, has not provok'd the Almighty to lessen every Day the Instruments of our Sensuality ; whether that

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stubborn Infection among our Cattle, which the several Rules and Orders that have hitherto been issued out, have not been able to stop, is not design'd as a Chastisement for our Abuses and Intemperance.

LET us admire and revere the Wisdom of God in this Method of His Discipline over us : Let it prove the happy Means of introducing that frugal Simplicity at our Tables, which is as elegant, as it is healthful ; and let it, once for all, teach us, That Temperance, and Moderation, which are absolutely necessary towards giving us the Possession of ourselves, and the Mastery over our Passions. When so many of the Divine *Judgments are in the Earth* ; when we are call'd upon by such a Variety of Admonitions, how inexcusable shall we be, if we do not *learn Righteousness !*

BUT whatever our past Errors and Miscarriages may have been, it is surely time to lay them seriously to heart : They, who have hitherto been insensible of the Blessing of professing so Pure a Religion, and taken little, or no Care to *walk worthy of it*, cannot be too soon convinced, that such a Conduct can never bear the Scrutiny of that Being, indulgent as He is, who has *brought us out of darkness into his marvellous light*. If every trifling Conversation and Amusement has been preferred to *the Words of Eternal Life* ; If the publick Worship

ship of God has been neglected for the sake of every little, mean Avocation, let us be wiser for the future, and remember, that where *our Treasure*, our True and Lasting Interest lies, there should our *Hearts* be also. And if we have carried our Notions of Civil Liberty to an unreasonable Height, and in consequence of such Notions, given unnecessary Disturbance to the Government that protects us, let us for the future *think* and *act soberly*, as we *ought to think and act*.

IN short, amidst all our other Schemes, and Cares for the publick Peace and Safety, let us not forget this principal Point, to make God our Friend: To this End let us lament, and forsake those Sins, which have drawn down these heavy Judgments upon us; and let us endeavour by the still pleasing Importunity of an unfeigned Humiliation, and true Repentance, to *stay* his avenging *Hand*: In a word, let us beseech him, for *his Mercies Sake*, that Mercy, which we have so often abused; but which, I trust, is not yet wearied out, to *correct* us, *but with Judgment, not in his Anger*, lest he brings us to nothing.

F I N I S.

Printed for W. L. ...
Lancaster, Pa.



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